Columns
Spirituality



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Gender inequality stymies progress. The future is with women. Unless women's health, education, dignity and liberation are assured, the progress of any society will be futile. Women constitute one half of humanity. To call women the weaker sex is libel. Women have greater intuition, are more self-sacrificing, have greater powers of endurance and greater courage. They have the innate ability of making a more effective appeal to any heart.

Our foundress St Madeleine Sophie said, "You educate a woman, you educate a family, you educate a family and you educate a civilization." There are also many variations of the saying: "You educate a man; you educate a person. You educate a woman; you educate a generation."

There are heart-wrenching stories of brutal rape, violent sexual assault, heinous crimes, and domestic violence of various forms, as one half of the population remains vulnerable in countries dreaming of development and rapid progress. Pope John Paul II writes in his letter to women:

> Women's dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented; they have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude. This has prevented women from truly being themselves and it has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity (Paragraph 3).

In the march towards development and growth, the sociopolitical setups in many developing countries do not provide a favorable environment for women to work to their full potential. Under the shackles of stereotypes, and the scourge of sexual harassment, inequality and abuse, life opportunities, top-notch jobs and promotions are denied because of possible maternity leave, child care and other family obligations.

As I've written previously for other publications:

> Women have been gifted with the unique capacity to uphold the primacy of love in human life. Her very physiological structure is so designed, that it has "room for another" and an innate sensitivity to the goodness of the human being. With the potential of birthing the new, woman is the image

of perfect love. The umbilical cord or the ethereal bond between her and "the other," is almost like a divine lifeline.

Women have tremendous innate skills to motivate others, collaborate, advance community interests, seek help and guidance. They have the strength, courage, determination and willpower to learn the new, earn the hard way and lead from the front. Women have evolutionary incentives in order to maintain a peaceful and harmonious environment. They are thus a pacifying force, with the healing touch, greater powers of endurance, helping to bridge the gap between different groups, ensuring that a broader, lasting, long-term vision be held on to, in order that peace takes root.

Down the ages, women have proved themselves as intellectuals, philosophers and prophets. In Vedic times, Maitreyi and Gargi were considered wise women and were consulted even by kings. In our day and age, we have Rani Laxmibai, epitome of unflinching courage or the Chipko movement women, who were able to stand up to the timber poachers and thus save the nearby forests. More recently we have Sarojini Naidu, Golda Meir, Indira Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher, Kiran Bedi and young Greta Thunberg. The list is endless.

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Every great woman truly embraced the situation, intuitively thought about it, valued it, experimented with it, and lived it every day, in every way, thus birthing a new technique, a novel methodology, an innovative plan which led to success. Many of these women were ordinary women who did simple acts, in extraordinary ways, leading to new pathways of success, making the world safer for the future generations. *Stree/Nari Shakti*, coupled with their relational skills, humane tactics and the magic wand of changing mindsets of an entire community, seems to hold the key to open the door to the needs of the new world, leading to people-sensitive changes and transformation.

Equality will not be given to us on a platter. We will have to demand it with prudence. Collective action is the only way forward and the key to change. Growing our souls for inclusive love, we will have to unleash our inner transformative power of feminine wisdom to gestate, incubate and cultivate deep listening to the Spirit

within. We will need an effective action plan of coming together to combat this disparity in this generation, by putting equity and equality at the center of every conversation.

Attitudinal and behavioral changes will be necessary. Courage, fortitude and perseverance will have to be our battle cry. We will have to turn our apprehension into action by getting involved and searching for outside the box solutions, and by being super creative and more flexible. International Women's Day, this March 8, is an opportunity to remind ourselves that the future is ours. Fortified with vigor and vitality, and taking a cue from Mother Earth, we too can regenerate ourselves, trump all bickering and obstacles that come our way, and forge ahead, celebrating ourselves and Women's Day every day.

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